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Digging Under the Surface of The French Laundry's Garden

By Devon Avery

"There's always been a garden at The French Laundry," Aaron Keefer, head gardener, explained. "It started with six beds in the courtyard."

Thomas Keller was able to buy the current three-acre plot about 12 years ago. They first planted just two beds on either side of the flagpole.

Being commercially zoned, there were plans for a 20-room inn behind the garden, but as Keefer so joyfully put it, "Everybody fell in love with the garden."

Farming since age five on his grandparents' farm in upstate New York, Keefer did everything from pick bugs off the plants to harvest.

At 17, he took a job at the best restaurant in town and went from dishwasher to fish cook the very first night. That enticed him to attend the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

Lured by the breadbasket of America, he came to California after graduation and worked for Michael Chiarello at Tra Vigne. He was offered a chance to stage (pronounced like Taj, it is a French word similar in meaning to intern) in The French Laundry kitchen and soon in the garden as well. With his skills and passion for both, he has a unique advantage communicating between the two.

Communication cannot be overstated. The gardeners and the chefs work very closely together, talking daily and doing weekly walk throughs. Keefer provides a garden



AARON KEEFER

availability list to the kitchen each evening.

Around 2 a.m., after the chefs complete their work, they sit down and create the next day's menu with the assistance of Keefer's list. The menus showcase the best the garden has to offer.

"Typically, we pick up their orders early in the morning and begin harvesting for that day. Often the food is prepared before it even reaches the fridge, so it is literally still alive," he noted

There was such energy in Keefer's voice as he took me through the steps. Although The French Laundry is number one, whatever is not ordered by them is offered to Bouchon and Ad Hoc. It is rare that the garden has anything left unused, but if so, Keefer delivers it to the Napa Food Bank, where he is excited to provide something fresh to supplement the canned and dry goods there.

Depending on the season, the garden grows 100-200

species, which require the efforts of Keefer and four others.

All water is sourced from an underground well.

Many of the species start out in the "hoop house," a highly efficient growing space.

Additionally, TFL has access to about an acre and a half at Trefethen and the beds at Ad Hoc. There's a long tradition between the Trefethens and The French Laundry, starting when Mrs. Trefethen grew flowers for the restau-

rant in the 70's and continuing today with her granddaughter.

The gardens provide for all three of Keller's Yountville restaurants, but because they cannot meet the full demand, about 200 other purveyors source the restaurants.

The garden is completely organic in practice. Official certification from the CCOF isn't critical to them.

Keefer said, frankly, "I'd rather give my guys a raise than pay that fee when we (Continued on Page 7)

Turbidity Discolors Water

Thursday (July 21) some local residents experienced "brown water" coming from their faucets. The most prevalent ugly water reports came from Lande Way, Stags View Lane and Redwood Drive, in the northeastern neighborhoods of Yountville.

Inquiries by Town staff determined the flow rate from Rector Reservoir, which is owned by the State of California and operated by the California Veterans Home, had been increased substantially in the main water distribution line to fill the storage tank at the Veterans Home. This increased flow velocity apparently had the unintended consequence of stirring up sediment within the distribution lines, resulting in the turbidity and discolored water.

Town staff flushed water lines into the street in several locations, and Town Manager Steve Rogers said the Town opted to switch to receiving water from the North Bay Aqueduct (NBA) for a time.

An update to the situation supplied by the Town this week said the water system has been flushed and appears to be clean throughout the Town.

Residents experiencing turbidity (brown water) were advised to run as many cold water faucets and hose lines as possible at once for three to five minutes or until clear. One way to verify clarity is to use a white cup or bowl to determine if the water is clear. Water customers with questions can call Don Moore at 310-2155 or contact him at dmoore@yville.com.

Petitions for Council Open Until Aug. 12; Mohler, Dorman Qualify

Yountvillians wishing to seek a seat on the Town Council in the November 8 General Election have until 5 p.m. on August 12 to submit completed nomination petitions.

Local voters will elect three candidates in this election -- a majority of the five-member Council.

Incumbent Marjorie Mohler has returned nomination papers and been qualified to run for one of the two open four-year seats, Yountville Town Clerk Michelle Dahme reported.

Vice Mayor Mohler will be seeking her third term on the Council, having first been elected in November of 2008.

Jeff Durham, who was appointed to serve the unexpired term of Lewis Chilton, intends to seek election to a four-year term on the Council. He has pulled his nomination papers but not yet submitted them.

This week Kerri Dorman returned nomination papers and was qualified to run for the two-year seat which was opened when Richard Hall resigned this spring.

Dorman is new to the local political arena but not to government.

"I have spent the last months meeting with friends and neighbors and even seeking out residents I've never spoken with before, because I wanted to determine what our town wants and needs in a new council member," Dorman explained. "All of the current council members I've talked with, and former vice mayor Hall, have encouraged me to run."

Dorman is a public law attorney who has spent the last nine years advising special districts that function as small towns. These districts provide their residents with water, sewer, streets, waste collection, recycling, law enforcement and fire protection. They are responsible for parks, set utility rates, sell bonds and can draft and enforce ordinances.

She has worked with neighborhoods in every phase, from breaking ground for the first homes and stores to full maturity, and is familiar with the unique challenges and opportunities of each

stage.

Dorman has attended most meetings of Yountville's Town Council for over a year and is vice chair of Yountville's Zoning and Design Review Board (ZDRB).

She recently completed a year-long term on the Napa County Grand Jury and has served as a municipal court judge.

Dorman also serves on the leadership council of the Rancho de Napa Residents Organization.

"I think my experiences, both generally and specifically with Yountville and Napa County, make me really well suited to come onto the Council at this time," she said. "The purchase of The Vintage Estate, the proposed sale of Hotel Yountville, the amendment of the General Plan -- our Town will soon be making some major long-term decisions. And, of course, we have our on-going concerns like parking, code enforcement, keeping our budget in line and balancing resident, veterans and business interests . . . I'm really excited about the opportunity to



KERRI DORMAN

serve our Town!"

She said her approach is to listen well, gather all the facts from all sources, talk it through with all parties involved, come up with a path that's best for our Town and then work like heck to make it happen.

"My first choice is always to reach a 'creative consensus' if we can," she stated.

Dorman and her spouse Devon Avery tell the story of how Yountville captivated them from the start. On vaca-

tion, they saw an ad in *The Sun* and made an offer on their house that same day. They travelled back and forth for three years and have lived here full time since June 1, 2013.

As Dorman put it, "I left full-time work on May 28, we drove 1,800 miles with the cat and the dog and were in Yountville by June 1. Since then, I've only come to love my new hometown more and more."



sundial

	High	Low
Wednesday 7/20	88	47
Thursday	89	45
Friday	92	46
Saturday	98	52
Sunday	93	53
Monday	88	57
Tuesday	103	52
Season Total =	0.00	
Last Year =	0.00	